

SoftSkill: Mastering Online Performance
Red Bull Studios
220 W 18th St, New York NY 10011
Date 4/9/15

SoftSkill: MOP
7 - 10 PM

7:00-7:15 Mingle
7:15 - 8:00 Profile Success Stories
8:00 - 9:20 Live Profile Critique
9:20 - 10 Downstairs Bar

Dear Trenz,

This module is an effort to build a seductive marketing myth applicable to feminism, sexuality, and the online dating market. Building a successful marketing strategy has always seemed to require taking things very seriously. A strong brand narrative protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community. Seduction is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Seduction is about humour and serious play. It is also personal skill and professional trait. At the centre of our seductive applications, our marketing, is the image of the Couple.

The Couple is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of producer and consumer, of domestic order as well as economic negotiation. Romantic encounters are lived social relations, our most important market construction, a world-changing brand narrative. Mainstream feminisms have constructed 'sex positivity' and uncovered or discovered this crucial collective object. This trend is a fiction and fact of the most crucial, political kind. Successful brand alignment, in the form of dating, rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. Achieving the Couple-form is a matter of relatability, identity, and social media maneuvering that changes what counts as Single's experience in the early 21st century. This is a struggle over sex and love, but the boundary between the personal and the professional is an optical illusion.

In the brand narrative of our time, we are all Single's profiles, theorized and fabricated hybrids of clients and servers; in short, we are already Coupled. The Couple is our ontology; it gives us our markets. The Couple is a condensed image of both your dream date and your "type." In the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism, the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other — the relation between Individual and Single and the Couple and the Relationship has been a brand campaign.

This module is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for negotiation in their construction. It is also an effort to contribute to feminist culture and theory in a cultural industry that imagines a world without Singles, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end.

The date is an event in a post-monogamous world; it has no truck with bisexuality, unalienated labour, or other seductions to Coupledness through an appropriation of all the powers of individual employees into higher management. The Couple skips the step of domestic unity and of identification with the single household. This is its illegitimate promise that might lead to subversion of its teleology as a reality TV show.

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The Couple is committed to having fun, meeting new friends, looking for the one and keeping options open. It is the most productive social unit. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the Couple defines a media environment based partly on a revolution of social relations on the internet. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchy, are at issue in the Couple form. The Couple does not dream of connection on the model of the family. The Couple would not recognize the love story; it is not made of fantasy and cannot dream the perfect climax. They are wary of commitment, but needy for connection- they seem to have a natural feel for hanging out, but without the courtship model of traditional dating. The main trouble with Couples is that they are the illegitimate hook-ups of entrepreneurship and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention the feminization of labor. But hooking-up is often exceedingly unfaithful to prior commitments. Their exes, after all, are inessential- though they still might not have been unfriended.

By the early twenty-first century in management culture, the boundary between soft skill and hard skill is thoroughly breached. The last beachheads of leisure have been polluted if not turned into office landscapes-- communication skills, motivational skills, emotion regulation - nothing really convincingly settles the separation of dating profile from resume.

We no longer feel the need for such a separation; feminist marketing affirms the pleasure of connection with the personal and professional. Movements for sex workers are not just attempts to expand the market for sexual identity; they are a Couple form that crosses the breach of body and work. Businesses and commerce over the last two centuries have simultaneously produced individuals as mere consumers, and reduced the line between marriage and trade to a faint trace re-etched in ideological struggle or professional disputes between agency and victimhood. Within this framework, teaching teenagers to "save themselves for marriage" should be fought as a form of child abuse.

Online dating is only one economy emerging for the production and consumption of relationships. There is much room for radical political people and industry leaders to contest the meanings of the corporal merger. The Couple appears as both the product and target consumer precisely at the interface of bedroom and the desktop. Far from signalling an alienation from the physical body on the internet, the "match" signals a pleasurable tight coupling.

Ana Cecilia Alvarez is a professional online matchmaker and has produced a broad range of concept oriented services for organs such as ADULT, The New Inquiry, VICE, and Dazed. She teaches Sex-Ed at Bruce High Quality.

Victoria Campbell is an artist and writer specializing in the areas of identity negotiation, relationship management, and black magic political economy. She teaches Sex-Ed at Bruce High Quality.

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